Strategic Insecurity After Saddam: Whither Regional Security in a World Turned Upside Down?

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by James Russell

Veteran Middle Eastern analyst and former Clinton Administration official Martin Indyk recently characterized the Middle East as being turned "upside down" in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.[1] It's hard to argue with his assessment. The Iraq invasion has unleashed wide-ranging forces that are re-ordering the internal and external dynamics of regional security that could see the region plunged into a prolonged period of strategic insecurity.

External politics have been altered in important ways. The political empowerment of the Shi'ite majority in Iraq, the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq, and the accompanying loss of influence by Iraq's Sunni community is profoundly altering the regional balance of power. Iraq no loner serves as the Sunni bulwark against Shi-ite and Iranian expansion, and the Sunni Gulf State monarchies (and Jordan) now find themselves as frontline states against an emerging Iranian-dominated alliance comprised of Iraq, Syria and Hizbollah in Lebanon. Iran's seemingly inexorable march towards achieving a nuclear weapons capability makes this alliance particularly disturbing to the Gulf States. In confronting these adversaries, the Sunni states also disturbingly find that the region's guarantor of security, the United States, in a weakened position. The limits of American military power on display in Iraq is combined with reduced political influence as a cumulative result of policy choices made by the United States over the last six years.

Confronted by a series of conflicting messages from Washington that at various times emphasized democracy, transparency and human rights and at other times demanded cooperation in the so-called war on terrorism, the region's elites are contemplating alternative arrangements to deal with the regional insecurity billowing out of Iraq and the rising power of Iran. Framed by the disastrous Iraq invasion and the abandonment of constructive involvement in the Arab-Israeli dispute, these contradictory messages all combined to decimate regional public support for the United States. The growth in anti-U.S. sentiment must be seen as an important structural force pushing the region's elites away from what had been a comfortable embrace with Washington and into a series of re-invigorated intra-regional relationships and a new willingness to highlight growing economic and political partnerships with Moscow and Beijing.

While *The Iraq Study Group Report* constructively addressed many of the problems confronted by the United States in Iraq, it left largely untouched the more troubling longer range strategic implications of the Iraq war. The Hudson Institute's William Odom has famously described the U.S. invasion of Iraq as "…the greatest strategic disaster in United States history."[2] Odom has gone so far as to predict a replay of the ignominious U.S. departure from Vietnam. In a piece posted on a website operated by the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University,

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Odom argued that television screens around the world will one day broadcast images of helicopters evacuating embattled U.S. personnel from the Green Zone in Baghdad, much as personnel were unceremoniously airlifted off the roof of the American Embassy in Saigon in April 1975.[3]

The decline of the U.S. regional position is altering a system of regional security that has preserved security and stability for the last decade.[4] The region's rush to reinvigorate dormant nuclear power programs and to initiate new "peaceful" nuclear programs represents one element of this strategic realignment. In December 2006, the Gulf Cooperation Council announced plans to start construction of its own nuclear power plants and Russian President Vladimir Putin toured the region shortly thereafter, promising to assist the GCC states in building their own nuclear power programs. In short, the region stands on the precipice of an era of strategic insecurity that may see the ignominious end of the regional security architecture first constructed by the British early in the 20th century and them embellished by the United States at the end of Gulf War I. This paper will review the development of the system of the regional security developed by the United States over a 20-year period and discuss its relevance in addressing the emerging and more unstable regional security environment being created as a result of the Iraq war.

Genesis of the Regional Security Architecture

At the end of World War I, the British confronted a series of paradoxes as they contemplated administering the spoils that victory in Europe had given them in the Middle East. All the former Ottoman dominions lay at their feet, stretching from Constantinople to Basra, Baghdad, across the Levant and down into the Hijaz. Victory in Europe, however, had exacted its toll, and the British faced a series of problems in administering these areas and integrating them into the empire. The war had emptied the country's coffers leaving it all but financially broke, and the public clamored for a return home of the troops deployed in far flung places like the Middle East—which might have served as an instrument for British influence and control in these domains. As Colonial Secretary, a politically rehabilitated Winston Churchill strove to construct a formula that would preserve Britain's position as the dominant regional power while simultaneously scaling back its level of commitment to meet domestic political and economic realities. All these issues faced Churchill and his assembled experts during the Cairo Conference in March 1921 where he and his advisers made a series of decisions that are still affecting the course of history in the Middle East.

The best known decision made in Cairo was the accommodation of Britain's Hashemite friends in the Hijaz that resulted in the creation of Jordan and Iraq. A less well known issue was also vetted during the conference, where Churchill (becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1924-1929 in his next cabinet job) became attracted to the idea of using the Royal Air Force (RAF) to police the restive tribesman throughout the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq in lieu of the expensive and manpower-intensive option of occupying these areas with British or Indian troops. Throughout the early part of the 20th century and spurred by operations during World War I, the RAF had built a network of airfields that linked Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, the Gulf, Mesopotamia, Iran, Afghanistan and India. After the war under the pro-active leadership of Air Marshall Sir Hugh Trenchard the RAF consolidated establishment of a series of airfields throughout the region in Aden, the Hijaz, Mesopotamia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the Trucial Sheikdoms, Oman, Afghanistan, Peshawar and Iraq. By the late 1920s, after receiving administrative responsibility for the Iraq mandate, the RAF had assumed responsibility for internal and external security of Britain's interests throughout much of the Persian Gulf.[5] RAF operations proved their worth to the British in their successful internal policing actions in Iraq, Yemen, Kuwait and the Trans Jordan, and Afghanistan during the interwar period. The RAF also helped beat back the marauding Saudi Ikhwan warriors during their raids into Kuwait, the Trans Jordan and Iraq in 1927-1928.

The infrastructure developed by the RAF during this period proved invaluable during World War II, facilitating operations throughout the Middle East and the Allied re-supply of 5 million tons of war

materiel to the Soviet Union through Iran. Following World War II, the facilities infrastructure provided the basis for the British military presence until 1971 when they finally departed the region. Following the British departure, the United States gradually moved in to fill the vacuum created by the British withdrawal as the 1980s saw the Gulf increasingly become the most common destination for deploying United States Navy battle groups. During Operation Earnest Will in 1987, the United States signed on to the idea of using its Navy to police the Gulf and escort oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz. A whole generation of American naval officers effectively came of age in the Persian Gulf during the 1980s and 1990s. The Navy's operational hub in the Gulf in Manama, Bahrain (inherited from the British) now administers a variety of activities devoted to maritime security and counter-terrorism in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean.[6] As the United States considers the consequences of its invasion of Iraq, the unanswered question is whether future generations of American naval officers will have the same career experience in the Gulf as those during the previous 20 years.

The Past as Prologue

It is easy to overdraw historical analogies in considering the current plight of the United States in Iraq and the Persian Gulf. Just as Britain used the RAF to artificially extend the era of Pax Britannica in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, the United States nonetheless now confronts a situation in which current circumstance in Iraq could represent the end of Pax Americana in the Gulf. The beginning of the era arguably dates to January 1980 when President Jimmy Carter announced that the United States would use force to protect its interests in the region.[7] As the United States sorts through the strategic fallout of its misadventure in Iraq, it must contemplate the fate of Britain's 80+ year-old template for maintaining regional security and stability that today still exists, albeit with the Stars and Stripes instead of the Union Jack fluttering in the hot desert breezes on military bases throughout the region.

While the regional ramifications of the Iraq war are profound, it is equally clear that events there constitute a phenomenon of global importance—an event that may dramatically alter the world's geopolitical landscape by signaling the end of the period of U.S. global hegemony that some had predicted would stretch far into the 21st Century.[8] Conservative Republicans who crafted the Bush II Administration's world view disdained the Clinton Administration's embrace of multilateral Liberal idealism and Meliorlist norms in favor of a more forceful and muscular approach to world affairs.[9] In the report titled *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century*,[10] the conservative Project for a New American Century called for the United States to assume its mantle of global leadership and take concrete steps to preserve and extend America's position of global pre-dominance. In a passage that could be regarded as the articulation of the Bush Administration's strategic direction—even before the September 11th attacks, the report's authors declared: "The United States is the world's only superpower, combining preeminent military power, global technological leadership, and the world's largest economy. Moreover, America stands at the head of a system of alliances which includes the world's other leading democratic powers. At present, the United States faces no global rival. America's grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far into the future as possible."[11] The role of the military within this grand strategy, according to the report, was to "…secure and expand the 'zones of democratic peace'; to deter the rise of a new great-power competitor; defend key regions of Europe, East Asia and the Middle East; and to preserve American preeminence through the coming transformation of war made possible by new technologies."[12] That vision of global untrammeled American power and prestige now lies in the tatters.

The "strategic" effects of the Iraq invasion are likely to be as far reaching as suggested by Odom in which implications at the regional level have a global impact on the ability of the United States to exert influence and leadership on wide range of issues. The regional effects of post Saddam Iraq are: (1) the political and military empowerment of a new and younger generation of state- and non-state actors that will profoundly shape the evolving politics and internal security within

the surrounding states; (2) enhancement of Iran's influence in the Gulf that will increase its political leverage over the Sunni monarchies on the Arabian Peninsula. For the United States the strategic implications of post-Saddam Iraq are if anything more serious: (1) the possible end of a 50-year era of American global political and military leadership based on a balance of soft- and hard power; (2) the increasing irrelevance of the American way of warfare as a tool to further its global influence and objectives; and, (3) the potential end of the regional security architecture in which the United States has guaranteed regional security from military bases inherited from the British and expanded upon during the 1990s.

Regional Implications of Iraq Invasion

The Iraq invasion came at a time of broader regional political upheaval and transition. The aftermath of the invasion simply throws more fuel on an existing fire, adding momentum to new intraregional political dynamics: (1) it reinforces pre-existing trends of generational political transition and the emergence of a new caste of internal political actors that are combining to pressure the region's governing elites; (2) the internal chaos in Iraq is also leading to the military empowerment of powerful non-state actors, providing them with the means to take on established conventional military forces using asymmetric tactics; and (3) assists Iran in its regional ambitions to extend its influence and power and its desire to position itself as a champion of regional political causes to the detriment of the surrounding Sunni political elites. All these three interrelated factors will shape the regional strategic landscape for years to come.

Unstable Internal Political Dynamics

One of the many critical failures in U.S. planning for the Iraq war centered on the idea that Iraqis would sit idly by while a tyrant was physically removed from a job he had occupied for upwards of 30 years and wait for another group to take his place. The Bush Administration actually believed that a new governing elite could be parachuted on top of existing governmental institutions in a seamless and peaceful transition.[13] This belief represented a fundamental misunderstanding of the structure of Iraqi politics and regional political dynamics. In Iraq, as elsewhere in the region, politics serves as an extension of the internal bare-knuckles battle for power between competing tribal, familial, sectarian and religious groups. For these groups, loyalties tend to lie not with governing institutions but with their broader community. Government and its institutions represent tools to exert authority and control over rivals, not necessarily as vehicles to create national unity and collective identity.[14] Removing Saddam popped the lid off a complicated internal political environment in which the Sunni minority had exercised political control since Ottoman times. The invasion re-opened the competition in the internal political balance of power that had been established when Britain installed a Sunni monarchy supported by a caste of Ottoman Sunni technocrats in the early 1920s. Supported by the United States, Shi-ite and Kurdish communities (both with significant internal fissures) seized their chance in the chaotic aftermath of the Iraq invasion to use governmental institutions as a means to exert influence and control over their Sunni rivals. The parsing out of government ministries to different Shi-ite and Kurdish figures in the aftermath of the December 2005 elections reflected this process.

These internal dynamics are layered upon an already fragile regional political climate. Upsetting the apple cart of Iraqi politics comes amidst a time of regional generational transition, with the anachronistic carcasses of discredited secular dictatorships and monarchies still littering the regional political landscape. The region is awash in post-colonial era familial elites desperately clinging to power and seeking ways to extend their collective reigns. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is positioning his son Gamal to succeed him. Syrian President Haffez Assad's son Bashar sits perched atop a creaky Alawite power structure. In Jordan, King Abdullah faces the daunting prospect of governing without the popularity and legitimacy of his father. In Bahrain, Sheik Hamad proclaimed himself king in an attempt to ensure that the Khalifa dynasty continues in perpetuity ruling over the island's restive Shi-ite majority. In Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah

recently decreed that succession would be handled by an internal committee and that power would not necessarily pass directly to the next figure in the succession hierarchy. In Kuwait, succession in the Sabah family was handled with the constructive input of an increasingly assertive Kuwaiti parliament. The region's political uncertainty is unfolding against the backdrop of the chaos of Iraq. The political upheaval in Iraq threatens to disrupt to delicate balance between the rulers and ruled throughout the Middle East. While they are a long time from surrendering their hold on power, events in Iraq and the collection of new actors vying for power throughout represent a challenge to all the region's elites.

Sectarian Fissures

The Iraq invasion re-opened simmering sectarian fissures that had for the most part lain dormant during the 1990s and the era of U.S. containment in the Gulf. Political empowerment of Shi'ites and Kurds in Iraq will have lasting implications in the region by re-igniting political aspirations within both groups across national borders.

Kurds in Iran and Turkey are already feeling the pull of the *de facto* Kurdish state that currently exists in northern Iraq. The armed Peshmerga today police the borders of the new Kurdistan, and the Kurds now have access to a portion of oil sales revenues coming out of the fields near Kirkuk and Mosul. It is estimated that oil reserves in northern Iraq total 48 billion barrels, with another 100 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The Kurdish Regional Government, or KRG, has already signed production sharing agreements with Norwegian and Turkish companies that are actively exploring for new wells in the Kurdish areas.[15] The KRG is treading delicately in its relationship with the Iraqi government in Baghdad, but there is little doubt around the region that in political terms the removal of Saddam has lead to the Kurds finally achieving their centuries-old dreams of achieving political autonomy. A Kurdish state in northern Iraq represents a potential threat to both Iran and Turkey, both which have sizable Kurdish populations. In July 2004, Iran and Turkey signed an agreement to cooperate on security matters relating to Kurdish separatist groups operating out of northern Iran. The agreement to cooperate against Kurdish groups comes amidst a growing Turkish-Iranian relationship that features the possible export of Iranian natural gas through Turkey to Europe.[16]

Political empowerment of the Shi-ite majority in Iraq following the removal of Saddam is also stirring Shi-ite political aspirations throughout the Gulf, where they form the majority in Iran, Iraq and Bahrain, with significant minorities in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon.[17] In December 2004, Jordan's King Abdullah voiced the concerns of the region's Sunni leaders when he warned of the possibility of a dominant Shi-ite crescent stretching from Iran through Iraq and Syria and into Lebanon.[18] Removal of Saddam revives the region's age-old religious rivalry between Shias and Sunnis stretching back over the centuries. The triumph of the Ba'athists in Iraq during the 1960s and their rule the next 40 years formed a critical component in the Sunni states' plans to keep Shiite influence bottled up in Iran, giving them a free hand to mange their own Shi-ite minorities. The model of Iraqi democracy, which has given the majority Shias political power, resonates powerfully within significant Shi-ite communities in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon.[19] Pilgrimages to the recently opened Shi-ite shrines in Najaf and Karbala have also invigorated the trans-national sense of Shi-ite religious identity and community that Saddam and the Sunni monarchies had long thwarted.[20]

New Political Actors

Empowerment of the Shi-ite communities and the increased pressure on the Sunni-lead states also comes at a time when a new caste of caste of populist political leaders and Islamist-dominated associations are emerging region-wide to challenge the religious, age-based and familial hierarchies that dominate regional politics. Leaders like Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon, Ismail Haniyeh in the West Bank, and Muqtada Sadr in Iraq are the vanguard of new political and

anti-democratic movements that are exerting authority through skillful grass roots politics backed by the point of a gun. These leaders are positioning themselves as alternatives to the familial and sectarian hierarchies that seized power with the departure of the colonial occupiers some 50 years ago. Importantly, below these visible figures are a variety of vibrant political associations in Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain and Yemen that are all mobilizing to exert power in the nascent democratic processes unfolding in these states. In Saudi Arabia, a group of once-dissident clerics has been re-admitted to mainstream society and actively participated in that country's municipal elections in early 2003.[21] Fiery anti-U.S. clerics like Saffar al-Hawali have been permitted to join the process of political mobilization in the elections, which only confirmed the popularity of the religious conservatives at the local political level. Reflecting the Kingdom's changing domestic political landscape, the regime stood by and allowed a group of clerics (including Hawali) in November 2004 to issue a fatwa urging support for jihadist forces inside Iraq. Region-wide political mobilization is being reinforced by the aftermath of the Iraq invasion, in which a variety of new actors are combining impressive organizational skills with Islamist and populist political rhetoric that melds Islamist political themes and historical narratives that feature resistance to traditional powers and sources of authority and a call to re-Islamicize society.

New Military Actors

An important and complementary factor that accompanies the emergence of new political forces shaping the landscape is the arrival of a new generation of conventional weapons that allows non-state groups to establish so-called states within states and to challenge established conventional military forces in the region. Shi-ite organizations like Hizbollah in Lebanon and the Mahdi Army in Sadr City are recent examples of this phenomenon. Both organizations have established states-within-states in their respective areas, combining political and military tools to exercise control. As Israeli and U.S. military forces have discovered much to their discomfort, increasingly lethal weapons like the RPG-29, anti-ship cruise missiles, advanced sniper rifles, remote piloted vehicles loaded with explosives, and new surface-to-surface rockets have provided insurgent and militia groups with dangerous new killing power. The Central Command's General John Abizaid told reporters in September 2006 that the new weapons provide an unwelcome "hint of things to come" in the already-deadly military landscape.[22] Abizaid is clear about intra-regional cooperation between a variety of different groups that is spreading weapons throughout the region: "There are clearly links between Lebanese Hizbollah training people in Iran to operate in Lebanon, and also training people in Iran that are Shia splinter groups that could operate against us in Iraq."[23] There have long been suspicions that Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps have been assisting insurgents and Shi-ite militias in fielding ever-more deadly shaped-charge improvised explosive devices that are exacting a growing toll on the road-bound U.S. military in Iraq.[24] The U.S. M1A2 main battle tank, Marine Corps Amphibious Assault Vehicle, British armored personnel carriers, and Israeli Merkava battle tanks have been destroyed by shaped-charge IEDs and RPG-29s in the last 36 months.

The new generation of conventional weapons proved critical to Hizbollah's successful resistance against Israel's overwhelming conventional military power in Lebanon in August of 2006. Hizbollah's organizational structure, featuring a decentralized command and control network with competent and innovative unit commanders, successfully executed a defense in depth that countered Israeli mounted infantry and armor and successfully struck an Israeli naval vessel.[25] Iraqi insurgents are also using similar asymmetric tactics against U.S. forces in Iraq, and many believe it is only a matter of time before the Shi-ite militias start to see their military capabilities grow with the new advanced weaponry.

It is no coincidence that this upsurge in regional military capabilities coincides with revelations that Russia has apparently abandoned its policy of restraining conventional arms transfers to Iran and developing nations around the world. According to the authoritative Congressional Research Service: "In recent years, Russian leaders have made major strides in providing more creative financing and payment options for prospective arms clients. They have also agreed to engage in

counter-trade, offsets, debt-swapping, and, in key cases, to make significant licensed production agreements in order to sell its weapons."[26] Many of the new weapons in Hizbollah's arsenal, such as the RPG-29, are believed to have been originally sold by Russia or are being produced under license in Iran, which provided these weapons to its terrorist clients in Iraq and Lebanon.

This weaponry, combined with appropriate training and organizational skills, provides non-state actors like the Mahdi Army and Hizbollah with the ability to threaten all the conventional militaries of the region. Hizbollah has established effective local control throughout much of southern Lebanon, and Shi-ite militias have similarly established control over much of Baghdad and southern Iraq. In both these cases, it's not clear that the central government authority has the military capability to reassert control over these areas. For the Sunni-lead states in the Gulf and Levant, this is particularly troubling given the history of conventional military incompetence throughout these states. Many regional states have historically kept their conventional militaries weak in order to minimize the chances of internal coups coming out of the military. The new military power accruing to actors like Hizbollah provides these actors with new bargaining leverage over internal political rivals as well as the surrounding regional states.

Regional Ascendance of Iran

The regional environment in the aftermath of the U.S. Iraq invasion suits Iranian interests and objectives. Iran's historic objectives of becoming the dominant regional political and military power have been realized. A comfortable political and military partnership appears to be emerging between the Shi-ite power structure in Najaf and Karbala with the Mullahs in Tehran. The U.S. military occupation of Iraq and the ongoing insurgency serve Iran's purposes in two ways. First, it ties down the United States militarily and reduces the coercive and deterrent leverage from its forward deployed forces. Instead of demonstrating U.S. resolve and strength as the neoconservatives had hoped, Iraq is demonstrating the limits of U.S. power and emboldening its adversaries. Second, the "slow bleed" of U.S. influence and military power in Iraq makes it more difficult for the United States to muster the political and military resources necessary to credibly threaten what looks like Iran's inexorable march towards a nuclear capability. Instead, the United States is forced to recognize Iran's dominant position. Iran now holds the keys to Iraq's future, not the United States. Iran is the new champion of regional political causes like the Arab-Israeli dispute. Where once Nasser and Saddam were the main attraction, today pictures of Iranian President Ahmadinejad and Hizbollah's Hassan Nasrallah dominate the souks of the Middle East.

Iran 's regional ascendance is aided by U.S. regional missteps outside Iraq. The Iraq occupation in conjunction with the U.S. abandonment of any role in trying to solve the Arab-Israeli dispute has dramatically reduced U.S. political influence throughout the region. All public opinion polls in the region taken over the last several years demonstrate that popular support for the United States has all but disappeared. The latest polling data released by the Pew Global Attitudes Project reinforces a series of disturbing trends in public opinion. July 2006 polling data in Jordan, Egypt and Turkey indicate that the publics there overwhelmingly believe that the U.S. presence in Iraq and the Arab-Israeli dispute are more serious threats to world peace that either North Korea or Iran.[27] The lack of widespread public support for the United States has caused traditional pro-American partners to distance themselves from Washington—to Iran's advantage.[28] Reflecting the widespread frustration with the United States, an exasperated Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal perhaps stated it best when he told reporters in September 2005: "We fought a war together to keep Iran out of Iraq after Iraq was driven out of Kuwait…Now we are handing the whole country over to Iran without reason."[29]

U.S. Strategic Implications

At the 1921 Cairo Conference, Winston Churchill is said to have stated: "I feel some misgivings about the political consequences to myself of taking on my shoulders the burden and odium of the Mesopotamia entanglement."[30] President Bush must also acutely feel the power of Churchill's logic as he contemplates the disintegration of America's position of global leadership following the invasion of Iraq in February 2003. Fifty years of American soft power and global leadership painstakingly shepherded by successive Republic and Democratic administrations have effectively been thrown away in the 36 months following the Iraq invasion. The decline in America's global position and the accompanying slide of its position in the Middle East is perhaps summed up by Richard Haas, chairman of the prestigious Council of Foreign Relations, who recently declared that the American era in the Middle East is all but over.[31] Haas argues that the United States must increasingly rely on its non-military foreign policy tools to address what he predicts will be an unstable and dangerous environment for the foreseeable future.

Whither the Security Architecture?

The decline of the U.S. global position and its reduced influence throughout the Middle East may make it increasingly difficult to maintain its military facilities throughout the Persian Gulf. As regional elites are eventually forced to bow to the unfolding forces of political change and transition, they will invariably be forced to distance themselves from their erstwhile protectors—the U.S. military. As these leaders look across the regional military landscape, they see a robust and maturing set of military facilities that has grown significantly over the last 15 years. The American forward deployed military presence in the Gulf has in the past served as an important instrument of preserving regional security and stability. At the end of Gulf War I, the United States took Britain's concept of linked military installations and added headquarters elements along with pre-positioned military equipment to a variety of facilities in the Gulf. Enabled by a series of bilateral defense cooperation agreements concluded between the United States and its regional partners, an overarching political and military framework emerged that saw a U.S. security blanket draped throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Mid-way through the 1990s, the United States had successfully pre-positioned three heavy brigade sets of military equipment in the region that formed the leading edge of the ground component that could be joined with air assets already in theater to counter conventional military threats to the peninsula. During the 1990s, the network of military facilities in Kuwait, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Oman allowed the United States to operationalize the sanctions enforcement missions against Saddam. The infrastructure also represented the literal representation of the security umbrella spread by the United States over the Sunni monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula. By the end of the late 1990s, the infrastructure comprised the following main components:

- Central Command Naval Component, or NAVCENT, in Manama, Bahrain;
- Air Force Central Command Component, first at Eskan Village in Saudi Arabia before moving to Prince Sultan Air Base and then to Al Udeid in Qatar in August 2003;
- Army Central Command Component, Kuwait;
- Heavy Brigade sets of ground equipment in Qatar, Kuwait and afloat.
- Harvest Falcon Air Force equipment at Seeb in Oman;
- Aerial refueling detachment at Al Dhafra in the United Arab Emirates.

During the late 1990s, the digital revolution's benefits began seeping through into U.S. military operations throughout the world. Under the rubric of the so-called revolution in military affairs, digitized pictures of the land, sea, and air environments got piped into American military bases and those of their coalition partners. The creation of common operating pictures helped create transparency and enhanced situational awareness to coalition militaries throughout the Gulf. By the time of Gulf War II, the network had changed with the addition of a veritable alphabet's soup of new command elements, organizations and operational nodes:

- Combined Forces Command Afghanistan (CFC-A) in Kabul that works with NATO's International Security Assistance Force;
- Also in Afghanistan is the Combined Joint Task 76 that directs combat operations throughout Afghanistan;
- Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa in Djibouti (CJTF-HOA), which is assisting countries in the region to build indigenous counter-terrorist capabilities.
- Combined Joint Task Force 150—a coalition maritime naval operation commanded by a revolving series of multi-national officers out of Manama, Bahrain that includes nine ships from seven countries performing maritime security in the Red Sea, Indian Ocean
- Combined Forces Air Component Command's Combined Air Operations Center at Al Udeid, Qatar. This constitutes the Air Force's Central Command's forward deployed theater component.
- Central Command Forward Headquarters, (CENTCOM-CFC) Camp As Saylihyah, Qatar, that is the leading edge of headquarters elements at Central Command's headquarters in MacDill Air Force Base, FL.
- Central Command Special Operations Headquarters (SOCCENT), Qatar, coordinates special operations in theater.
- Multi-National Forces Iraq (MNF-I) oversees all combat operations in Iraq.
- Multi-National Security Training Command—Iraq (MNSTC-I) that coordinates the program to train and equip Iraqi forces
- NATO Training Mission—Iraq that focuses on developing the Iraqi officer corps
- Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), Kuwait, that constitutions the Army's Central Command component that coordinates Army activity throughout the Central Command area of responsibility. CFLCC also maintains an area support group, or ASG, at Camp As Sayliyah in Qatar
- Central Command Deployment and Distribution Center (CDDOC), Kuwait, that supports theater-wide logistics and information distribution.
- Information, Surveillance and Reconnaissance launch and recovery facility at Al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates. This facility provides the Air Force Central Command Component with a operational and logistics hub to support theater-wide intelligence surveillance and collection with a variety of collection platforms.[32]

As was the case in Gulf War I, the infrastructure proved its use once again in the buildup and prosecution of the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The facilities provided the command elements to coordinate the flow of forces into the region in the buildup to Gulf War II. Once the invasion started, these facilities provided command and control to the operational forces and coordinated the flow of information and materiel in support of combat operations.

Today's Gulf military infrastructure needs to seen with the context of a new scheme of supporting forward operations throughout the arc of instability is spelled out in the Bush Administration's *National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*. Released in March 2005, the report calls for a new global posture that features main operating bases, or MOB, forward operating sites, or FOS, and a "…diverse array of more austere cooperative security locations," or CSLs. These facilities are intended to be linked and mutually supportive. Main operating bases—like the facility at Al Udeid , for example, are well-developed with sufficient infrastructures to support large numbers of forces and to receive even larger numbers in times of crisis. Forward operating sites are "….scalable, 'warm,' facilities intended for rotational use by operational forces. They often house prepositioned equipment and a modest permanent support presence. FOSs are able to support a range of military activities on short notice."[33] The new, networked scheme of forward operating areas can be expected to spread out into the arc of instability from the main operating areas in the Gulf.

Since the Iraqi invasion in early 2003, the United States has been showering the region with military construction projects in order to prosecute ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan:

- In October 2004, as part of supplemental appropriations to fund ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, Congress earmarked $63 million in military construction funds for improvements at the Al Dhafra airfield in the United Emirates, which accommodated a United States Air Force aerial refueling detachment during the 1990s and now hosts an information, surveillance, and reconnaissance launch and recovery facility.
- The same bill contained $60 million to fund additional enhancements to the Al Udeid airfield in Qatar.
- In Afghanistan, the United States is spending $83 million to upgrade its two main bases at Bagram Air Base (north of Kabul) and Kandahar Air Field to the south.[34] The funding will be used to expand runways and other improvements to provide new billeting facilities for U.S. military personnel.
- The expansion of the facilities infrastructure in Afghanistan has been mirrored with the development of facilities and solidified politico-military partnerships in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.[35]
- In early 2006, Congress approved $413.4 million for Army military construction projects in Iraq and Afghanistan through 2010. The same bill funded $36 million for Air Force construction projects in these countries.
- In Iraq, the United States has so far spent an estimated $240 million on construction at the Balad base (north of Baghdad), the main air transportation and supply hub; $46.3 million at Al Asad, the largest military air center and major supply base for troops in Al Anbar; $121 million at Tallil air base (southern Iraq); Other projects include $49.6 million for Camp Taji located just 20 miles northwest of Baghdad; $165 million to build an Iraqi Army base near the southern town of Numaiy; $150 million for the Iraqi Army Al Kasik base north of Mosul.[36]

A Political-Military Disconnect in the Gulf?

The relevance of the new network of facilities in the Gulf and Central Asia to the regional political environment is at best questionable. At worst, it reflects a mismatch between the military capabilities being built and the regional environment in which the capabilities are meant to be used. The emerging facilities infrastructure is built on the premise that the United States needs to perform two basic military missions: (1) flow large numbers of conventional forces into the region and; (2) address regional contingencies with forward deployed forces on short notice with special operations forces and weapons platforms capable of standoff precision strikes. It is unclear in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion whether the United States can realistically expect to perform either of these missions.

The growing American regional military footprint comes at a time when the political environment is increasingly hostile to the United States. As a result, the expanded footprint could prove unsustainable as regional elites continue to distance themselves from the United States. Some of the region's elite are better positioned to resist internal pressures than others. The al Nahyan's in the United Arab Emirates, for example, face no serious opposition or internal political pressure to reduce their ties with the United States. Hence, the U.S. operation at Al Dhafra Air Base remains safe for the time being. But in other Gulf States, such as Bahrain and Kuwait, changing internal political dynamics may force the regimes to start pressuring the United States to reduce the military footprint. The wild card and lynchpin for the regional base structure is in Iraq, where the United States has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in new military facilities. Given what is an untenable long-term military situation, it appears inevitable that a phased U.S. withdrawal will come in the next several years, pressured by the Iraqis and domestic public opinion in the United States. It is unclear whether any Iraqi government will acquiesce to a long-term, foreign military presence in the new bases being built at Balad and elsewhere.

Moreover, the Bush Administration's plans to achieve global military reach using forward deployed forces operating from networks of bases appear mismatched to the region's threat

environment, which is likely to be dominated by populist warlords and internal sectarian strife. The combat environment inside Iraq featuring insurgency and irregular warfare is trumpeted by various strategy documents as being the most likely combat environments facing the United States around the world. The experience of the U.S. military Iraq is disheartening and provides a vivid testament to the limits of that military power. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, the U.S. military remains institutionally pre-disposed against messy and costly ground wars like that which it is encountering in Iraq. Despite Secretary Rumsfeld's attempts at "transformation," the American military departments remain wedded to kinetic-type operations that depend on ever more expensive strike platforms but which are of limited use in insurgencies and constabulary operations.

Conclusion

The aftermath of the Iraq invasion could represent a watershed for the Gulf military base structure that continues to be populated with ever-more and new staffs and organizational structures. While the concrete jungle that continues to sprout from the sands of the Persian Gulf might have made Sir Hugh Trenchard proud, it's not clear that the network of military facilities will be of much future use in preserving regional security and stability. If Iraq proves to be a precursor to prolonged period of strategic instability as new actors vie for political power throughout the region, the facilities infrastructure established by the British and passed on to the United States may prove to be casualty of this process. Such an environment suggests that externally-applied military power via forward-based ground presence will prove to be of decreasing importance and may well be politically untenable for the regional elites. This does not mean that the United States will have no tools at its disposal to project military power and influence. The end-result of the coming regional upheavals and the pressure this will place on the ground-based military presence means that the United States Navy may once again reign supreme, projecting power and influence on an episodic basis from the sea. Should such a scenario unfold, the next generation of U.S. naval officers can rest assured that their career paths will in fact remain consistent with their forefathers and that carrier battle groups and expeditionary strike groups will continue to make their way to the Persian Gulf.

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